

Representative
KATHY HAIGH

Reports
to the 35th District
Spring 2000



Dear Friend:

Thank you for taking time to let me share an overview of the 2000 Legislative Session. This year has been a challenge, but it has also been very rewarding. Bills such as the Patients' Bill of Rights and unemployment and worker-retraining have passed and been signed into law. This legislation will make a big difference for all of us who live in the 35th Legislative District.

Education will remain my No. 1 focus. We have set high standards for our school districts. How do we help them attain these high standards?

Initiative 695 has been and will continue to be our greatest challenge. Funding for transportation remains controversial, and unsolved. We have our work cut out for us on this issue.

My legislative report covers topics in addition to the Patients' Bill of Rights, worker-retraining and education. Legislation expanding health coverage for more Washington citizens, as well as measures dealing with transportation, personal privacy, and veterans' issues are very important items on my agenda.

Don't hesitate to get in touch with me whenever you have your own thoughts to share!

Sincerely yours,

Kathryn Haigh
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Representative Kathy Haigh

Education:

Making our good schools even better

We have set high expectations for our public schools. The question I asked earlier — “How do we help our schools attain the outcomes we expect?” — must be answered. Last session, I helped to create the Commission for Academic Achievement and Accountability, or the Triple A Commission.

This commission has been working to find ways to implement the standards we feel will make our schools stronger. The stakes are high — and the success of education reform in our state hangs in the balance. I will continue to focus on the issue of paying for schools based on real needs of individual students in the classroom — rather than funding formulas based on the number of students.

Better school funding

Talking with people in the community, I often hear concerns that all lottery dollars do not go to our schools. My goal is to accomplish what people thought they had voted for years ago: lottery dollars going directly to our public schools.

This session, I supported legislation designating lottery funds to go to a new account called the Better Schools Fund. This would establish and give our schools the added support they need to attain the high standards we have set, and for which we will soon hold them accountable.

Restructuring

I believe in the concept of small, community-centered schools — rather than huge, consolidated schools. This idea has begun to make an impact on education across the country.

It is obvious that many of our more significant problems in public schools — such as violence and high drop-out rates — can be substantially reduced in smaller schools. Even students facing the challenges of severe poverty or a broken home naturally do better when they receive the attention afforded them in a smaller school setting.

The best size of schools may average no more than 300 students in primary grades and no more than 1,000 students in secondary grades. I will pursue research and a method by which we can begin to re-establish small, community-centered schools.



Technology

I support the use of technology to create more learning opportunities in schools and libraries. I am committed to using technology to ensure that people in rural communities have access to the same opportunities as those in urban communities.

We have worked to improve the interconnection of all school buildings across the state with high-speed lines called the K-20 network. I believe it's time to put those connections to work in ways we could not even imagine a few years ago. Through technology, we can find efficiencies that may save our school districts millions of dollars — and increase the accuracy of our record-keeping systems. I have sponsored House Bill 2662 to study the use of technology and a centralized record-keeping system. I support every means possible to create more efficient government.

Curriculum

A World War II oral history project came to my attention when it was introduced in the House Education Committee. To develop the bill, I worked closely

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with a WWII veteran who lives in our 35th district. We worked to amend the bill to include language that is important to veterans — and we succeeded.

The gentleman with whom I worked and other citizens have established a foundation to gather the oral history of surviving WWII veterans. We want to bring them together in a video documentary in our schools. Sadly, we are rapidly losing our WWII veterans — and the need to preserve their personal stories and the historic impact of their efforts must be accomplished soon. This is a monumental effort by veterans of Washington state, and I plan to stay directly involved in this important endeavor.

Transportation: Funding projects after I-695

The real work has just begun. We need funding to keep our ferries afloat, to bolster transit, and to pursue needed road-building projects and freight mobility. We must address the issue if we are going to find over a billion dollars every two years to keep the people and economy moving. We must find a long-term solution and learn to do more with less.

I am working to raise support for the ferries. A long-term solution to the problem is needed — and yet there are no perfect solutions yet proposed.

Gas taxes continue to be a major source of transportation funds. Everyone who uses our roads should pay for them — including people who come here from other states and countries. We have expanded the use of transportation dollars to maintain all public transportation, including transit, ferries, rail freight, passenger trains, car pools and commute-trip reduction. There are, however, constitutional limitations on how we use gas-tax dollars.

The Transportation Commission has been working on this issue. My primary concern is that proposals from the commission may be too late to keep our ferry system intact. If we do not find some way to raise dollars on a state level, we may be out of business for ferry service — and most other public-transportation systems.

And yet we know that public transportation is the only option we have left if we are going to keep people, goods and services moving. Transportation gridlock hits all parts of our state, particularly our commerce. That puts our jobs and lifestyles at risk.

Health Care: Making coverage affordable

Access to affordable health care continues to be an important issue for the 35th Legislative District. Health-insurance accessibility is improved through legislation addressing marketplace concerns — providers will be able to offer individual health insurance without going bankrupt. Two bills this year should make a difference for all of us:

First, individual health care should soon be returning for more citizens in our area. Senate Bill 6067 offers insurance companies relief from losses due to the high cost of medical care when people do not remain insured for extended periods of time. Unfortunately, the cost of health care may still be prohibitive for many people. We must continue to address the affordability of health care and prescription drugs.

I co-sponsored a second health-care measure: the “Patients’ Bill of Rights.” This legislation establishes basic consumer protections — and holds insurers accountable for their health-care decisions. The bill also establishes a consumer-grievance process, including the right to sue the insurance company. Health-care providers will be held to the same high standard of care and practice as doctors and nurses.

State government: Our personal privacy must be kept and respected

I introduced legislation in the House State Government Committee to ensure that sensitive, personal information about citizens isn’t used for unlawful purposes against them. The bill, which has been signed into law, will prohibit people from reviewing or copying credit- and debit-card numbers, electronic-check numbers, card-expiration dates, and other types of financial information kept by state agencies.

The law regarding public records shouldn’t be used by people who want to get their hands on private information. Public records must be made available for public inspection and copying — that’s what the law says now. But the key point — and my reason for introducing this bill — is that personal information shouldn’t be considered a public record. When you supply an agency with this sort of information, you shouldn’t have to worry that specific details about your financial life will fall into the wrong hands.

Veterans:

Respecting those who have served our nation

We must never forget our veterans. They deserve our gratitude and support — and I have worked to bring their issues to the Legislature this year.

However, I recently read a compelling letter to the editor which reminded me to turn my attention once again to the more hidden population of veterans.

They are the Korean- and Vietnam-era veterans who remain unrecognized and underserved. There were no parades when they returned home from active duty — yet they served in some of the most difficult military engagements. As a result, they remain our unsung heroes. We must find a way to honor them and serve their needs.

The Veterans Home in Retsil — managed by the Department of Veterans Affairs — remains a concern. The facility has fallen victim to time and neglect — and improvements cannot come soon enough. I am committed to working with the department through the Joint Select Committee for Veterans and Military Affairs.


I will be helping build community support, as well as working to develop a master plan as a means of obtaining the funds necessary to remodel this facility.

The veterans community, as well as the community that serves their needs, have a great stake in this process.

Another pressing issue for our veterans is health care. They run the highest risks of serious physical and mental illness. Veterans often don't know about benefits and services they deserve! We are changing the model by which veterans are served — bringing services closer to their homes. Congress recently created a law requiring “community-based care” for veterans.

We need to support an aggressive approach to the implementation of that law in Washington — and it will take a coordinated effort of local, state, and federal governments to address veterans' health care.

Appropriate and compassionate care for many ailments afflicting veterans must become our focus. Veterans served our nation in its time of need — and that makes it is our national debt to serve them in their time of need. And it is a debt that should be funded by the federal government — not as an added expense for taxpayers in our state.

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